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THE BENEFIT OF EARLY INSTRUCTION IN RELI-
GION, ILLUSTRATED AND EVINCED:

IN A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

S^T. T H O M A S's

JANUARY 1, 1787,

FOR THE

BENEFIT of the CHARITY-SCHOOL,

IN

GRAVEL-LANE, SOUTHWARK.

BY

ABRAHAM REES, D.D. F.R.S.

PRINTED AT THE REQUEST OF THE MANAGERS.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED BY H. GOLDNEY, FOR T. LONGMAN,
J. BUCKLAND, AND T. CADELL.

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THE REVISED EDITION OF THE
GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL

IN A

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JANUARY 1872

FOR THE

RENT OF THE CHAMBER

IN

GRAND ST. COURT

BY

ABRAHAM REES, D.D.

PRINTED AT THE REQUEST OF THE MANAGER

LONDON

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1, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.

S E R M O N, &c.

PSALM lxxi. 17.

*O God, thou hast taught me from my Youth;
and hitherto have I declared thy wonderful
Works.*

IT is the peculiar excellence of the sacred writings, that they contain a variety of important and useful instructions, adapted to men of every age and station. And they have this obvious advantage above many other compositions of a similar kind, that they convey instruction by example, as well as by reasoning and precept. In this view the reflections of wise and good men, recorded in the volume of inspiration and applicable to every period and condition of human life, claim our peculiar attention. The reflections of age, dictated by the wisdom of experience, deserve universal regard. None can be unconcerned in the enquiry, how a period, to which all are directing their views and wishes, may be rendered peaceful and pleasing; and none can be

more competent to our information and assistance than those, who have actually attained this period, and whose own experience serves to afford us the satisfaction we desire.

The testimony, recorded in the text, and now presented to your attention, is of this kind. It is that of a person, who, in the review of life, might have enumerated many signal interpositions of divine providence in his favour; who might have gloried in the worldly wealth, honour and dominion, which he had acquired; and, according to the too common estimate of mankind, claimed pre-eminence of merit from his distinguished prosperity and success:—but who valued himself principally on account of other advantages, which he had enjoyed, and who, in his address to God, recognizes it, as the highest privilege conferred upon him, *“that he had been taught from his youth.”* Providence had entrusted the conduct of his early years with those, who had given him lessons of virtue and piety; who had instructed him in the principles and practice of religion; and who had directed him to seek for happiness in the pursuit and enjoyment of the divine favour. The instructions and admonitions, imparted to him in his youth, had been farther enforced on his regard in his riper years.

This part of the history of his life he considers as most deserving of his notice; and in the recollection of it, he cannot forbear to pour forth his grateful acknowledgments to God; to whose directing and overruling providence he was ultimately indebted for a privilege,

privilege, so high in his esteem. Nor, indeed, does the instruction of wisdom in early life, especially when it has been accompanied with corresponding effects, appear in any case so important and valuable, and so much call forth into exercise the devout spirit of affectionate gratitude and praise, as in the close of our pilgrimage on earth; deriving from the remembrance of it the choicest consolations and the most cheering prospects. And the testimony of those, who have experienced the benefit of it through a long course of trial and danger, and the evening of whose days is brightened by the review of it, furnishes a very peculiar recommendation of its importance and use. From their concurring evidence in its favour, every other argument must acquire additional energy and influence.

Availing ourselves of this evidence, to which the declaration of the text, as that of a person in advanced life, obviously refers, we shall proceed to enumerate some of the principal circumstances, that serve to evince the benefit of early instruction in religion.

It deserves to be considered,

I. That youth is the most proper season for communicating religious and moral instruction. It is not only that period of life, in which instruction is most needful, but that in which it is most likely to produce effect. The human mind has been, not unaptly, compared to a field or garden, which, without culture, will soon be overrun with noxious weeds. The powers of reason unfold themselves by slow degrees: whereas appetite and passion, excited
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by objects of sense, acquire influence more rapidly. The former must, therefore, be aided, and their progress to maturity hastened by instruction; and the latter must be checked and restrained by discipline. The want of experience must be supplied, as much as possible, by admonition; and the inferior propensities of our nature, which are apt soon to become violent and impetuous, must be counteracted by principles of religion in concurrence with the slow and feeble deliberations of reason: and these principles should be inculcated betimes, and enforced by authority and affection. Admonition, authority and affection will comparatively be of little avail, if licentious passion has been suffered to gain dominion, and criminal indulgence to ripen into habit. As it is much more easy to avoid than to rectify an error; to prevent than to remedy an evil: this is an object of primary importance in directing and regulating the conduct of early life. The youthful mind cannot, therefore, be fortified too soon with those principles of piety and with those maxims of prudence, that are designed to preserve it from being ensnared and corrupted. The sooner this is done, the more likely will it be to succeed.

The fundamental principles of religion and virtue; those that have the greatest influence on the temper and conduct; are so plain and so important, that even the infant understanding is capable of receiving them: and if they are cherished betimes, it will not be easy to eradicate them. But if the culture of the mind

mind is neglected in early life, and no methods are used to communicate necessary and useful instruction; prejudices, passions and habits, very unfavourable to virtue and piety, will become obstinate and imperious; bar every avenue by which light and conviction might be conveyed to the understanding; and render the heart insensible and callous, and the will stubborn and inflexible. *Barthol.*

H. Early instruction is most likely to make a deep and lasting impression. Those ideas of God and futurity, which the mind acquires in youth, and which have been repeatedly inculcated by parental authority and affection, are not easily effaced. Imbibed betimes and cherished with care, they become familiar and habitual; and though their influence may in some cases be counteracted, they are seldom or ever wholly lost. They are easily revived, when they seem to be forgotten; and even in a state of great degeneracy, they are not altogether without effect.

We might appeal for the truth of these observations to fact and experience. Those who have enjoyed the advantage of a religious education in their youth, will testify, that principles of religion which they then acquired readily recur in advanced life, and that no change of circumstances has erased the impression of them from their minds. Joseph, Moses, Nehemiah and Daniel, notwithstanding the allurements inseparable from high stations, and to which each of them was peculiarly exposed in an idolatrous court, maintained for many years the principles of their youth;

youth; and uniformly opposed the temptations to desert or to disgrace them, from which they could not have been exempt. The attachment, which men have usually discovered to the religious sentiments and profession of early life, has not been slight and transient. The prejudices and errors of childhood have been obstinately retained in maturer years. We may, therefore, reasonably suppose, what is found true in fact with the exception of very few instances, that the principles of truth and duty which are betimes inculcated, will make deep and lasting impressions. Whereas, if the mind is left uncultivated in youth, a thousand secular cares and pleasures will occupy its attention, diminish the efficacy of good instruction, and easily obliterate the faint and superficial traces which it produces in the understanding and heart.

The most effectual method of fixing the judgment and engaging the permanent inclinations of the heart in favour of religion; the method for this purpose, which is most likely to ensure success, and which observation and experience recommend, is to implant and cherish good principles in the youthful mind. They will thus gain strength and dominion in its progress towards maturity; and, to whatever degree their practical influence may be obstructed, they will never be altogether or irrecoverably discarded.

III. The benefit of early instruction is apparent, because it will serve to prevent many irregularities of conduct, which would lay the foundation of self-reproach and remorse, and other

other injurious consequences, in maturer or declining life. For want of this many have had reason to lament, that in recollection, if not in other instances of painful experience, they have been made to possess the iniquities of their youth.

Whatever privilege the folly and vice of the young may plead; and whatever candour and lenity they may expect or actually find in the judgment of others; their own remembrance of the dissipation and profligacy of early life will sooner or later prove humiliating and distressing; and they may live to bewail those instances of criminal conduct, which apparently occasion no present uneasiness. When the fervour of passion abates; when multitude of years or of renewed trials hath made them grave and serious; and frequent intervals of reflection occur; the review of an unprofitable, and much more of an irreligious and profligate youth, will shame and grieve them; and they will need no monitor to upbraid and reproach them. There is not a more painful office than that of visiting the sick or dying, to whom this character applies; and of witnessing the distress they feel, when alarmed by a sense of their danger in the recollection of early and advancing life, devoted to vanity and sin, without being able to soothe and calm the troubled mind. Early instruction will greatly contribute, at least, to diminish the number of such awful scenes. It will, with a divine blessing, prevent that allowed practice of iniquity; that habit and excess of vice and impiety, which no thoughtful mind

can review, even in a season of outward ease and security, and much less in a time of affliction and approaching dissolution, without regret and self reproach.

If principles of religion, imbibed betimes, had no other effect besides that of preventing the anguish of remorse and the terror attendant upon it; they must appear to be highly important and useful. But it deserves also to be considered, that, by being taught from our youth, we are directed and guarded in the most perilous period of life; when the judgment most needs direction and the passions require peculiar restraint; when temptations are most powerful and we are most exposed to danger.

If we escape uninjured at this period, and preserve our integrity and peace of mind; can we less than acknowledge with gratitude the benefit of the instruction we have received? With this invaluable advantage, we are prone to miscarry; without it, our case must have been next to desperate. If, notwithstanding the guidance and restraint of religious wisdom in early life, we are apt to wander into forbidden paths; to neglect or transgress our acknowledged duty: undirected and unguarded, how perilous would have been our condition! Unadmonished by our own minds, how probable that lapses and miscarriages, which we lament would have ended in confirmed profligacy, and in all that remorse and shame and ruin, which are its ultimate issue! The mind, that has not altogether lost its rectitude
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and sensibility, will, from errors and crimes that are bewailed and forsaken, derive arguments to evince the importance and use of early instruction; without which the contrition and anguish it has felt might have terminated in irreparable agony and distress. Those, who have been preserved, and those, who have been reclaimed, under the influence of religious and moral principles imbibed in early life, will concur in their grateful and honourable testimony to the advantage of *having been taught from their youth*. Ye once stood, Sirs! on the brink of a precipice, where a few false steps repeated might have hurried you to a declivity, the steep descent of which, terminating in the tremendous gulph of perdition and despair, would have been unavoidable. Have ye escaped? Have ye gained a broader, firmer and less dangerous path? Look back with wonder and gratitude; and bless the unseen hand, stretched out by providence in the wisdom and fidelity of the instructors of your youth, that has conducted you through a scene of imminent danger and planted your feet in a more secure place. I observe,

IV. Early instruction lays the foundation of progressive, distinguished and eminent virtue and piety. Life is short and uncertain: our infirmities and failings are numerous: and with all imaginable prudence and assiduity in improving our time and talents, our attainments can be but partial and inconsiderable. Alas! how few and imperfect indeed, if we neglect to improve or misemploy the period

of early life! Those, however, who are *taught from their youth*, have an opportunity of beginning soon; and by discovering betimes a conscientious regard to religion and virtue, and maintaining it uniform and persevering, of exhibiting them to observers in their loveliest form, of gaining for themselves distinguished reputation, and of being to others eminently exemplary and useful. They enjoy an advantage which some have lost, and the loss of which they regret with shame and grief; which others less favoured may well envy; and of which ambition, if they had not a thousand other principles to influence them, might nobly avail itself:—the advantage of being *great* as well as *good*; of standing foremost in the rank of the votaries of virtue; and of encircling their character with a glory, which must charm and command veneration from every beholder.

They have this also to consider for their encouragement, that by beginning well, their chief work is done. Having escaped the first temptations that beset them, and vanquished the first difficulties that occur in their way; their progress will be comparatively easy and pleasant; and the farther they proceed, the more numerous and powerful will be their inducements to persevere. *Train up a child*, says Solomon, *in the way wherein he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it*: a declaration, founded on the presumption, that early principles of virtue and piety will produce lasting effects; and that *the path of the just,*

just, thus furnished, will be like the shining light, which shineth more and more to the perfect day.

In a word, there is no character so excellent in itself; so honourable to religion; so beneficial in its influence on others; that entitles to such distinguishing praise; and that qualifies for so high a degree of future blessedness, as that of those *who have served God from their youth.* They who are *thus wise, shall inherit glory; they shall be had in everlasting remembrance.*

V. The review of life will afford inexpressible delight to those, who have enjoyed and properly improved early instruction: and it will encourage their trust in divine providence amidst the vicissitudes and trials, that may await them. Great will be the joy of those whose conscience testifies, that *in simplicity and godly sincerity, and not with fleshly wisdom, they have had their conversation in the world.* The consciousness of their integrity will establish their confidence in the mercy of God, the promises of the gospel and the mediation of the redeemer, and furnish a perpetual spring of satisfaction and delight. The well-grounded hope, that God is their friend and father, that Christ Jesus is their Saviour from guilt and death, and that a blessed immortality will be their final portion:—this hope will be an antidote against anxiety, a support in trouble and a consolation in the hour of sorrow. In the principles of religion, deriving peculiar evidence and energy from the discoveries of
christianity

Christianity and the undertaking of its divine author, they will find motives of acquiescence, patience and resignation in every changing scene of life: and that trust in the wisdom and faithfulness, in the power and goodness of God, which is founded in experience, and justified by their conduct and the grace of the gospel, will render them steadfast and unmoveable in the path of duty, and preserve them from unbecoming dejection and complaint in the season of unavoidable trial. That gracious Being, who has been their guide and guardian through the past period of life, whom it has been their endeavour to obey and honour, and whose favour they have thus secured, *will never leave nor forsake them.* Under his continued conduct and care, they can pursue the journey of life through its remaining stages without fearing any evil; or at least animated by the assurance, that *as their day is, so shall their strength be,* and that *all things shall work together for their good.* Habituated to reflections on the overruling providence of God, they have resources in every occurrence, to which others are strangers; and satisfied that their heavenly father loveth and careth for them, that he is the sovereign of nature, and that his dominion is everlasting; they will wait with patience and hope till their last change comes. This leads me to add,

VI. That principles of virtue and piety, imbibed in youth and maintained through life, will render the closing scene calm and tranquil, and brighten our prospects of a future
and

and eternal state. In that awful hour, when *flesh and heart shall fail us*, nothing can administer succour and consolation but religion. Those will *then* be most secure and happy, whose faith in God and Christ and futurity, has had the greatest influence on their temper and conduct, and whose whole life has been a course of preparation for this solemn season. Amidst the decays of nature and the approaches of dissolution, how animating and joyful the reflection, that our youth and riper years have been devoted to God and religion; that our most vigorous and active powers have been employed in the service of God, of the Saviour, and of mankind; and that we have neither deserted nor disgraced the profession assumed in early life! *Having fought the good fight, and kept the faith, and finished our course,* we shall then have reason to conclude, that *there remaineth for us a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give unto us at the day of his appearing.*

With this prospect we shall be, in a great degree, firm and fearless in the last conflict: and persuaded, that God, who *has taught us in our youth* and given us repeated occasion for *declaring his wonderful works*, will not *cast us off in the time of our old age*, nor *forsake us, when our strength faileth*, we shall acquiesce even in nature's decays, welcome the summons to depart, and *rejoice in hope of eternal life.*

Honourable and happy is such a close of a prolonged life of exemplary virtue and piety! Nor can any thing more satisfactorily illustrate
and

and recommend the advantage of early instruction.

Have we been taught from our youth? Let us gratefully acknowledge and diligently improve our inestimable privilege.

We owe it to the all-disposing providence of God, who orders the time and manner of our entrance into life; and who places us under the care of those, that instruct us in our duty and direct us in the way of true happiness. To God, therefore, let us devoutly ascribe the ultimate glory and praise; and consider this provision of his goodness for our present and eternal welfare as a motive to quicken our activity and zeal in his service. Nor has he merely appointed teachers for us in an age of ignorance and inexperience, but distinguished us above many others with respect to the means of instruction which we possess. Those, who are the *guides of our youth*, are themselves taught by the infallible and authoritative oracles of divine truth. They derive the instructions, which they communicate to us, from the word of God; and they enforce them on our regard by those awful and alluring motives, that are recorded in the gospel of his Son. Hence they acquire a peculiar claim on our attention and obedience.

The God of nature hath also invested them with an authority; endued them with an affection; and inclined them to a solicitude for our happiness, which entitle them to honour and regard. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

instruction: and therefore, my son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother; for they shall be an ornament of grace to thy head and chains about thy neck.

As we advance in life, we shall become daily more sensible of the value, as well as of the necessity, of the instruction and advice we receive: and unless it be our own fault, we shall have occasion; we shall be disposed, with bended knees and thankful hearts, to recognize and acknowledge the goodness of providence in thus highly favouring us. Let ingenuous ingratitude, therefore, influence us to pay that deference to early instruction, which it deserves; and the benefit of which we shall experience through life: ever remembering, that of him to whom much is given, much will be required.

Moreover, if early instruction is a privilege of such importance and value, as we have now endeavoured to represent; it is the duty of parents to be faithful, assiduous and persevering in imparting it to those, who are committed to their care. Should providence succeed their upright, affectionate and unremitting endeavours, as they have every encouraging reason to expect, they and theirs will have ground of rejoicing in the review to the latest hour of life; I should rather say, to the most distant period of their existence. They will approve themselves, and be unspeakably happy in the consciousness of their fidelity: their posterity will bless them: God will honour and reward them. How awful the alternative! If

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parents

parents are negligent of their charge; and the vice and ruin of those, whom they have not instructed and admonished, should be alledged against them in the day of final retribution: the consequence is distressing beyond measure, even in imagination.—But I forbear. None who hear me need being urged by motives of terror to the discharge of their duty in this respect. Affection, guided by wisdom and divine authority, has an impulse, which they have never been accustomed to resist.

There are, however, some parents, who have neither ability nor opportunity, whatever may be their inclination, to give to their children such instruction as may qualify them for serving God and their generation according to his will. The children of such parents are objects of peculiar compassion. Their case recommends itself to every principle of piety and of benevolence in the human heart. None can be duly sensible of the importance and utility of early instruction, who are not disposed to contribute towards *their* obtaining this valuable blessing. A blessing it is of inexpressible value to them; and in its remoter consequences interesting to us all, and to the community in which our lot is cast. The attempt to enumerate the various arguments and motives that enforce this exercise of charity on your regard, would detain you too long; and besides, it is altogether needless. The subject is familiar to you. Your conviction of the utility of the institution, that now claims your attention, precludes reasoning; and

and your disposition to promote it requires no inducement. The pleasure of providing the means of instruction for the offspring of the poor; and of thus rescuing them from penury and vice, of forming them for usefulness and reputation in the stations assigned them, and of conducting them to future glory and happiness, is of itself a recompence, which, I am persuaded, your own experience teaches you how to value. Besides, God is not unrighteous to forget any exercise of your benevolence and liberality in behalf of those, whom his providence has entrusted to your compassion and care. Those indeed, who now solicit your protection and succour, *cannot recompence you*; but the blessing of our common parent will retaliate your kindness to them even in the present state; and you will be amply *rewarded at the resurrection of the just*. The judge shall then say to those, who manifest their piety and benevolence on occasions of this kind: *inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me: and the righteous shall go away into eternal life.*

It will be sufficient to recite, according to annual custom, the following particulars relating to the history and present state of the Charity School, to the support of which we have now an opportunity of contributing.

The foundation of it was laid in the year 1687, at a time when a school was set up by Poulton, a Jesuit, and public notice was given that he would instruct the children of the poor *gratis*. On this occasion Mr. Arthur Shallett,

Mr. Samuel Warburton and Mr. Ferdinando Holland opened this school, with a view of preventing the injurious consequences of a Popish school, by providing instruction for the children of the poor on Protestant principles.

The number of scholars was at first 40; but it is now about 180. They are taught to read, write and cypher; and the girls are prepared, by suitable qualifications, for those stations, to which Providence has appointed them. All are instructed in the common principles of Christianity, and thereby qualified for the service of God and Man. This is the first school, in which the Protestant dissenters were concerned; and it is conducted with a liberality which recommends it; and with a sole view to the common good; children being admitted into it without any distinction of parties.

This school is situated in one of the poorest parts of this city; and the children of indigent persons, such as watermen, fishermen and others, are taught without any expence to their parents, and furnished with spelling books, testaments, catechisms, and books for writing and cyphering.

The charges of its support are defrayed by the gifts, subscriptions and bequests of private persons, together with an annual collection in this place.

To the children of this school I beg leave to recommend gratitude to their benefactors, and above all, to that merciful providence which has raised friends to instruct their youthful minds,

to guard them in a period of danger, and to qualify them for usefulness and happiness. Be respectful to your teachers; diligent in improving your time; and affectionate to one another. Avoid falsehood and profaneness; and shun the company of those who are idle and obstinate, and who take the name of God in vain. *Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day;* and be regular in your attendance on the public worship of God. When you leave school and go out into the world, remember the instructions you have received; study to please those who employ you, and always endeavour to be approved and commended in every thing you say and do. Those who are now your friends will rejoice to hear, that you behave well, and that you are useful and happy. God will take care of you whilst you live; and when you die, make you happy for ever. May his favour and blessing ever attend you!

I shall now close this discourse with congratulating those, who, *having been taught from their youth*, have through life adhered to the lessons of wisdom and piety which they received; and the evening of whose days is rendered serene and peaceful by the review. May no cloud arise to intercept your prospect of the glorious and happy end of your faith and patience! May your dying testimony confirm that of your life! May the cheering ray of hope gild the dark passage into an unseen state! At the morning of the resurrection may we all be united in society and blessedness for ever. Amen.

F I N I S.

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**7 JUL 36
LIKEWISE**

**THE OBLIGATION AND IMPORTANCE OF SEARCHING
THE SCRIPTURES, AS A PRESERVATIVE FROM
POPERY:**

A S E R M O N

Preached at Salter's-Hall, Nov. 5, 1779. To the Society, that support the Lord's-Day Evening Lecture at that Place;—and published at the request of the Society.

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